

GOVERNOR MARKELL AND PUBLIC HEALTH URGE FLU VACCINATION

NEW CASTLE – At the annual Division of Public Health (DPH) flu immunization clinic at the New Castle Farmers Market, Governor Jack Markell urged Delawareans age six months and older to get their annual flu vaccination as early as possible. Then he pushed up his sleeve to receive his own flu shot.

“Get your flu vaccination, not the flu,” Governor Markell said. “The flu vaccine protects you and your family, co-workers, and others. The flu is easy to transmit and you can get it from healthy – but unvaccinated – children and adults.”

“All Delawareans, especially our elderly, our young children, those with chronic health conditions and compromised immune systems, need protection,” said Delaware Health and Social Services (DHSS) Secretary Rita Landgraf who also received a flu vaccine at Friday’s clinic. “Even if you’re not in a high-risk group, you likely live or interact with those who are.” Individuals with lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic conditions are at risk of suffering such complications from influenza as pneumonia, worsened asthma, and circulatory problems.

Last year’s flu season was particularly difficult. During the 2014-2015 flu season, Delaware had 28 reported flu-related deaths and over 2,300 reported flu cases, compared to four deaths and more than 1,700 reported flu cases in the prior season. The biggest challenge last year was the unexpected mutation of one strain. Past experience showed that this particular strain resulted in more hospitalizations and deaths, especially among those at highest risk of complications from flu infection. These include older people, the very young and those with underlying medical conditions. This year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC) is confident of a better match between the vaccine and this year's circulating viruses.

"The protection offered by vaccinations is important for everyone, not just those at high risk," said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. "Healthy people who get sick from the flu might not be hospitalized or die, but they might miss important school or work functions or fun events like family time, holidays or a vacation or get other people sick."

Since it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop and provide protection against the flu, Dr. Rattay recommends getting vaccinated as soon as possible, preferably by the end of October. Seasonal flu activity commonly peaks in the United States between December and February.

The Farmers Market flu clinic is one of 36 DPH flu clinics scheduled statewide from October through December. It also doubles as the site for a mass flu immunization emergency preparedness drill. Among other things, this year the drill is testing DPH's ability to quickly and efficiently serve people with disabilities and ensure their needs are met as part of a larger vaccination event.

"Many Delawareans have access and functional needs – seniors, people who use wheelchairs, walkers, and canes, people who speak a different language, and those who cannot see or hear or use the English language well," said Nick Fina, who has profound, lifelong hearing loss. "I'm glad that Delaware Health and Social Services is offering additional accommodations in recognition of our needs, and that they are receptive to suggestions."

Flu symptoms come on suddenly, and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches and body aches, and fatigue. Some people get complications including pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections. Providers can

prescribe antiviral medicines to make illness milder, hasten recovery, and prevent serious complications, hospitalizations, and even death.

DHSS asks Delawareans to first seek flu vaccine from their health providers. DPH flu clinics are available for those who without a doctor, who cannot pay for the vaccine because they are uninsured, or who do not have insurance that covers the vaccine. Flu vaccinations are also available through most area pharmacies, grocery stores, and college health centers.

Though the DPH flu clinic vaccinations are free, donations and Medicaid are accepted. The DPH clinics located at the Hudson State Service Center in New Castle County, the Williams State Service Center in Kent County and the Adams State Service Center in Sussex County also vaccinate ages 6 and above by appointment. Children ages 6 months to 8 years who receive the flu vaccine for the first time need two doses, with the second dose given at least 28 days after the first dose.

For Public Health vaccination clinic dates or find out how to schedule an appointment, call the Delaware Immunization Hotline at 800-282-8672 or visit www.flu.delaware.gov.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each

day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, drink almost no sugary beverages.